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TAGS: PREL PHUM KWMN KCRM NU

SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: RAISING AWARENESS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, HUMAN TRAFFICKING

REF: A. SECSTATE 142614

1B. MANAGUA 2295

11. (U) Summary: Post marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence from November 25 to December 10, by engaging with women's rights organizations, universities, civil society, the media, and the Nicaraguan police commissariats for women and children. In cooperation with the University of Central America (UCA), on December 6 we organized a forum entitled "The Diverse Faces of Violence against Women" and screened the film "Human Trafficking" to raise awareness of the connection between gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. Leading national daily La Prensa ran an op-ed by the Ambassador highlighting the U.S. commitment to combatting violence against women. The passionate response to the human trafficking film reveals there is a demand for information on this topic. End Summary

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMANITY

12. (U) As part of our efforts to engage with local media to call attention to gender-based violence during the 16 days of activism, the Ambassador drafted an op-ed entitled "Violence against Women is Violence against Humanity" which ran in leading center-right national daily "La Prensa" on December 16. The Ambassador reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to defending women's human rights, advancing women's economic and political empowerment, and combating trafficking in persons. He also underscored the need to address underlying causes of violence such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and weakness in the judicial system--key factors that enable violence against women to continue unabated.

DIVERSE FACES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

13. (U) In partnership with the Program for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at UCA, the Embassy organized a forum on December 6 entitled "The Diverse Faces of Violence against Women," with the participation of Commissioner Mercedes Ampie, Chief of the Police Commissariats for Women and Children; Sylvia Torres, former Fulbright scholar and gender specialist with the Millennium Challenge Corporation; and Gretel Lopez, National Director of Casa Alianza, a G/TIP grantee and one of the leading NGOs involved in protection and reintegration of trafficking victims. Although Aminta Granera, Director General of the National Police and post's nominee for the 2007 Women of Courage Award, had previously agreed to be the keynote speaker, she was unable to participate due to a scheduling conflict. PolCounselor delivered opening remarks to kick off the program.

14. (U) After the panelists' remarks, in keeping with the theme that violence against women comes in many forms we capped off the program with a screening of the film "Human Trafficking" followed by an informal reception. The audience was riveted by the film, and clamored for it to be shown to a broader audience. Several UCA professors expressed their interest in including the film as part of the gender studies curriculum. Another participant suggested we show the film on one of the public television stations. One participant remarked that the U.S. Embassy's backing of the event gave the topic greater weight and legitimacy.

15. (U) Commissioner Ampie discussed the role of the women and children's police commissariats in dealing with violence against women, explaini

16. (SBU) As there is no law against intrafamily violence in Nicaragua, many acts of violence against women are treated as offenses or misdemeanors which carry no penalty. There has been a 36 percent increase of reported cases of violence against women this year, an indicator that more women are coming forward to "break the silence" about gender-based and domestic violence. In a separate meeting with Poloff, Ampie lamented that the judicial system in Nicaragua is susceptible to corruption and is biased against women so that most of the cases that come to the attention of the police are never processed by the judiciary or are treated with impunity. She explained that the police are now trying to place greater emphasis on prevention by working with the entire family rather than simply with the woman as victim, but the commissariats (which receive funding from the Swedish government) need outside help to strengthen and sustain their programs. Since victims of violence need to be examined by a medical doctor assigned to the Institute of Medical Forensics under the auspices of the Supreme Court before they can take any legal action, women who have been sexually abused often give up rather than submitting to medical examination.

GENDER VIOLENCE IN NICARAGUAN CULTURE

17. (SBU) Sylvia Torres delivered a passionate, if somewhat abstract, presentation on the cultural roots of violence against women and her theory on how the perpetuation of a patriarchal power structure leads to tolerance for and justification of gender-based violence and the subordination of women. In addition to echoing Commissioner Ampie's concerns about the alarming statistics of violence against women and girls, Torres addressed the growing trend of forced child marriage, when parents marry off underage daughters, who have been raped and sexually abused, to their aggressors who are usually much older men. In her view, the patriarchal family model suppresses the rights of women and translates into authoritarianism of the state. Capturing a common sentiment among Nicaraguan feminists, she voiced solidarity with a group of nine women activists from the NGO Women's Network against Violence who have been under investigation by the Public Ministry since late November for their controversial intervention in 2003 on behalf of a nine-year old girl known as "Rosita" who was repeatedly raped and eventually impregnated by her step-father. She criticized the government for going after women who are "defending the rights of women," while narcotraffickers, rapists, and other criminals are "out on the street."

18. (U) Grethel Lopez of Casa Alianza set the stage for the film with an articulate overview of the problem of human trafficking as a form of violence against women and girls. She described the increasingly sophisticated ways that traffickers use to stalk, lure, trick, and exploit their victims. Children who have been abused in the home are often preyed upon by traffickers who lure them with false promises of a better life, travel to exotic places, or even gifts such as cell phones and money. Even if rescued and returned to their home, victims of domestic abuse are likely to be revictimized by traffickers. Organized human trafficking rings also increasingly resort to the use of an older female figure who functions as an intermediary or advisor and prepares victims to work as sex slaves after they are essentially held captive, deprived of food, and broken down. The female figure often is a trafficking victim herself. Asserting that the fight against trafficking in persons was a shared responsibility, Lopez expressed regret that even in the face of evidence of a trafficking crime, government and civil society often look the other way and do nothing.

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SPREADING THE WORD
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19. (U) After the conclusion of the film, there was an informal exchange with participants who voiced their appreciation for the Embassy's initiative.
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COMMENT
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10. (SBU) Since final exams were being held the same week as our program, student attendance at the event was limited. Based on the positive response by professors and other attendees, however, we will identify additional opportunities to reach a broader audience and show the film in other educational settings. Given the current climate of hostility between the women's movement and the Ortega government (Ref. B), this is an opportune time to demonstrate U.S. support for women in Nicaragua, particularly in the areas of ending violence, fighting trafficking, and promoting women's economic empowerment, education, and health.

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